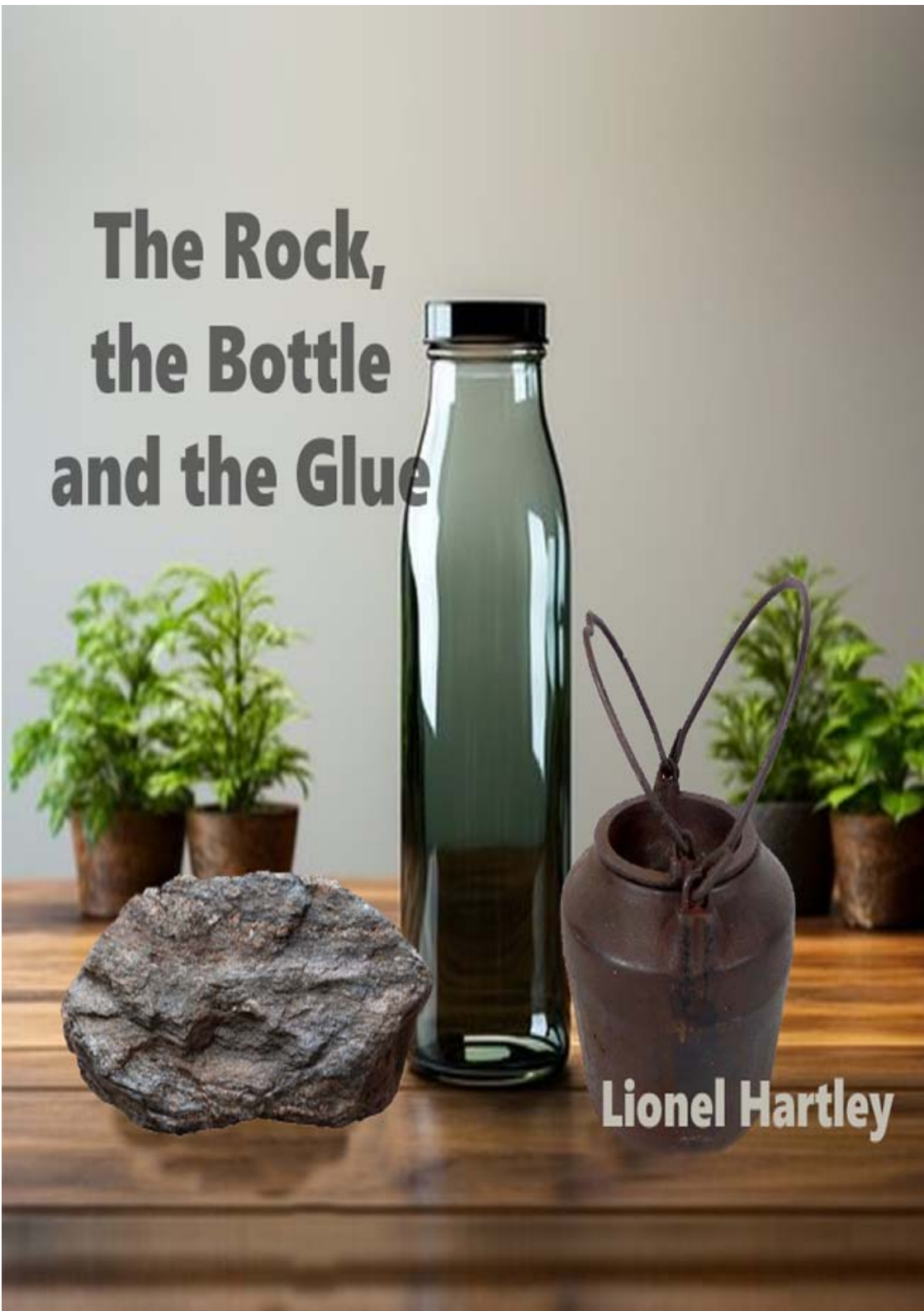
The Rock, the Bottle and the Glue



Lionel Hartley

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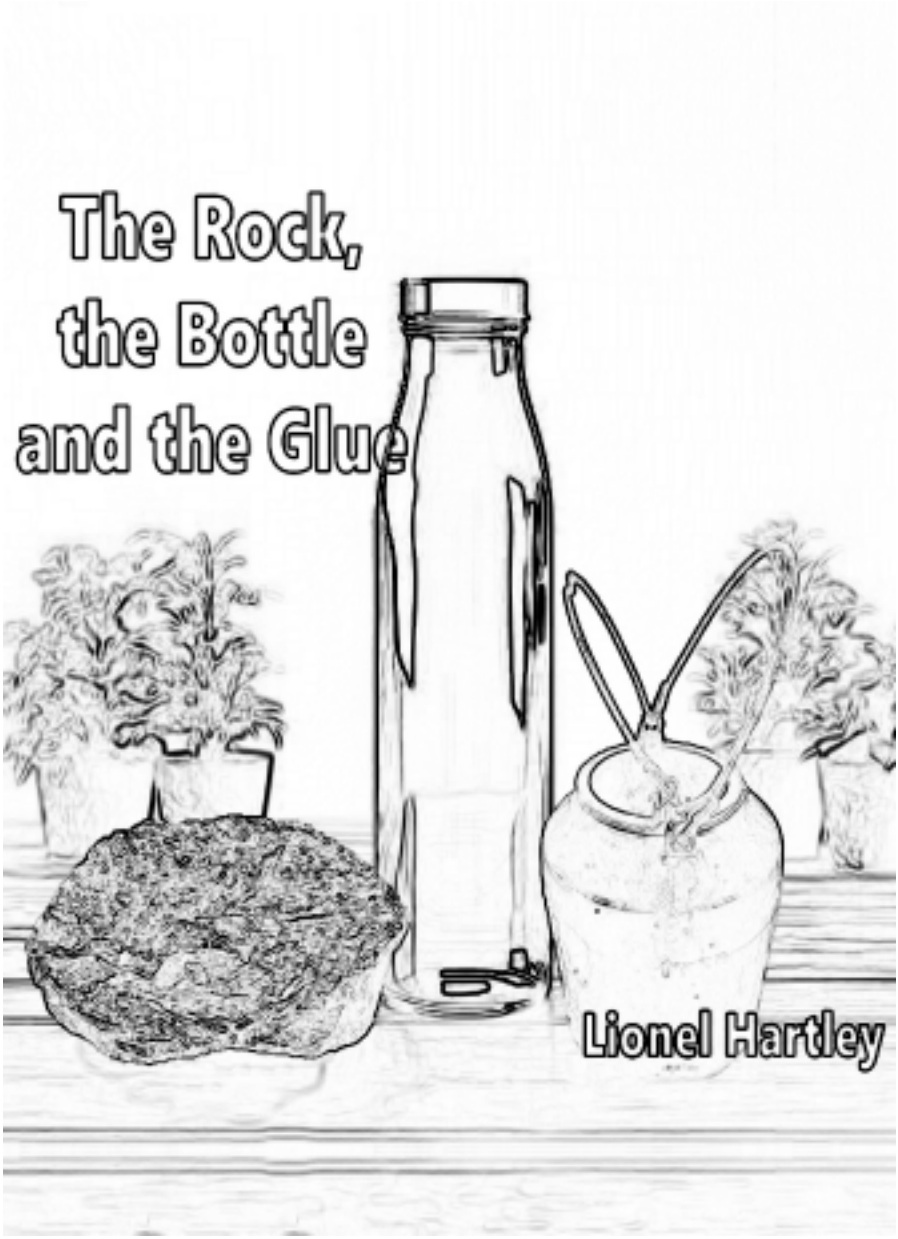

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The Rock, the Bottle and the Glue
Lionel Hartley
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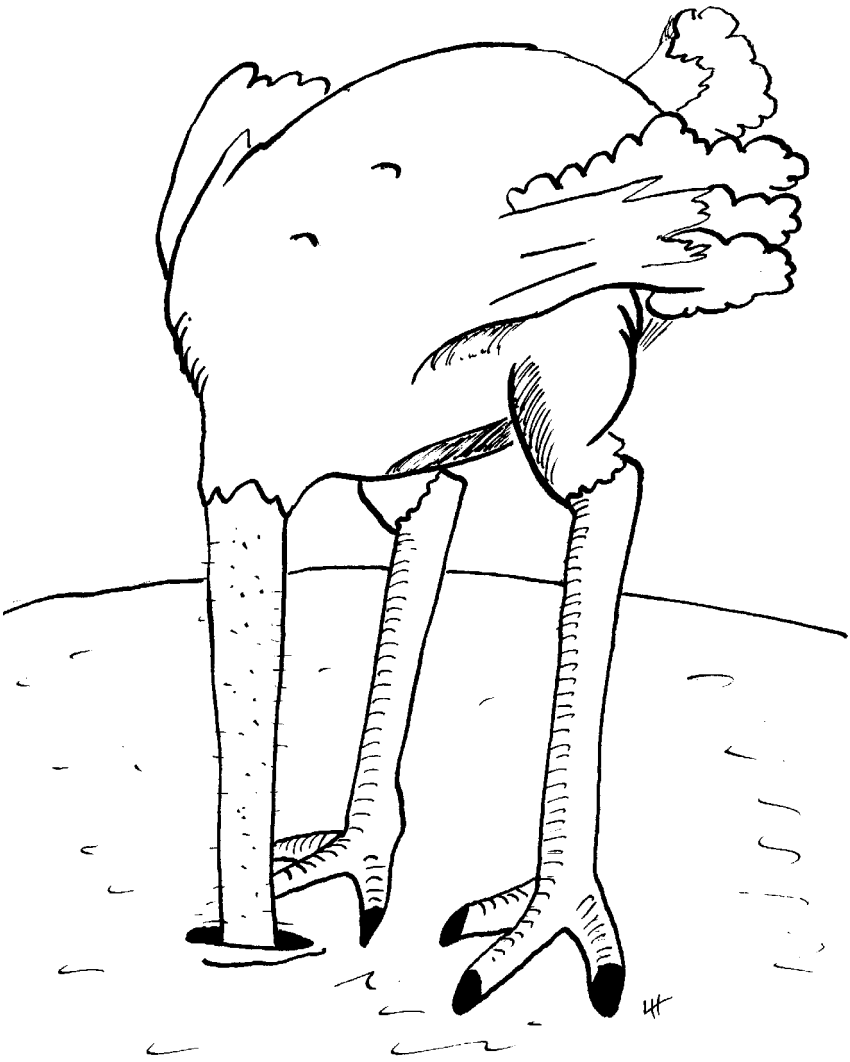


Introduction

God's truth is immutable, transparent and steadfast.

Kim Duk-Soo will never forget November 20, 1950. That was the day the Korean Communist troops found Kim Duk-Soo hiding with his father in a root cellar.

Kim, recently retired as the administrator of Presbyterian Hospital in Taegu, has difficulty telling his story. He is not alone. Hundreds of thousands of Christians made up the human wave escaping the North for the free South. And each has a similar story of deliverance from a regime opposed to religion.

"When we heard the soldiers coming, I was sure we would be killed," says Kim, his eyes filling with tears. "My Daddy told me we could not tell a lie to save our lives."

Kim's father had pastored the same church for 42 years. He had helped his wife hide their children by covering them with rice bags and dirt. But after two days of hiding, Kim uncovered himself.

Just then, Communist troops approached the house. Kim and his father ran to the back yard and hid in the root cellar.

"I told God I would serve him all my life if I got out of the root cellar alive." The soldiers found Kim and his father and took them off to a makeshift prison. They were to be executed the next morning.

That evening, a captain approached Kim. "Are you a Christian?" he asked. For a fleeting moment, exchanging his life for a lie seemed the only logical way to go. But the young boy remembered his father's instruction: we should not tell a lie to save our lives. "I am a Christian," Kim said.

The captain drew closer, and whispered, "I am a Christian too. I used to be a Sunday School teacher before the war. You must escape tonight. I will help you."

Kim fled that night, having to leave his father under heavy guard awaiting his eventual death.

The young Kim reached an American army base, and for the next ten years, Kim stayed there and played the musical instrument for chapel services at the base.

Chapter 1: The Rock

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "The great boulders which lie along the valley of Storo in the Tyrol are of a granite unknown in that region; they must have come from a great distance. Now it might be hard to explain the method by which they arrived in the valley, but it would be absurd to deny that they are there. Most unaccountable is the fact, but a very strong and stubborn fact it is, for there they lie, huge as houses and yet perfectly alien to the country."

"There are truths in Scripture which puzzle us; we cannot understand their relation to other portions of revelation. They are mysteries, apparently alien to the spirit of other passages. What then? Although we cannot account for them, that does not alter the fact that there they are, and it would be extreme folly to deny their existence because they puzzle us. Rather let us find room for adoring faith where reason is lost in wonder."

There are three Hebrew words for "truth" used in the Bible.

Firstly we have the word koshet which means "balance" (The only usages of this word are Proverbs 22:21 and Psalm 60:4) The other two words each conjure in my mind the image of a rock. And yet a rock is a poor analogy for truth, as a rock is secured to one place, unable to be shared or carried, cold and uninviting.

Emeth mean "solid", "constant", and "reliable" and emoonor means "secure", "firm", "steady", and "stable". Truth is as immovable as a rock.

An archaeologist will tell you that an antholite is a flower turned into stone, still showing the form, but the fragrance is gone. In almost every congregation there are antholite Christians among us who used to be fragrant for Christ, but who are now as stiff and as dead as a stone. Petrified lives, having (what Timothy calls) "the form of godliness without the power". Truth without love is as cold as stone.

John 4:23-24, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth".

Truth is Objective; Spirit is subjective. Those who have the Truth alone dry up. Those who have the Spirit alone blow up. Those who have love alone will puff up. Those who have the Spirit of God, and both love and truth will grow up.

I like what it says in Proverbs 16:6 - By mercy and truth iniquity is purged. And in John 1, Jesus is described as "the Word [that] was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Sometimes valuable rocks are hidden, but we can search for them

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, a soldier belonging to one of the French garrisons in India became enamoured of the eyes of Brahma, in the Temple of Seringham.

These eyes were diamonds, and were the most brilliant in all the East. Their lustre captivated the soldier’s soul.

He haunted the temple and pretended to yield to the might of the god, and become a convert to his worship. The priests so far believed in him that he was

admitted to some care of the temple.

They doubtless thought Brahma would be able to protect his own eyes. But on a stormy night the soldier disappeared, and with him one of the idol's eyes, the other having resisted all his efforts to dislodge it.

So Brahma was left squinting, and the treacherous Frenchman sold his prize to a captain in the English navy for ten thousand dollars.

A shrewd Armenian merchant paid fifty thousand dollars for it, and sold it to Count Gregory for Catherine of Russia for four hundred thousand dollars.

That was the origin of the famous Orloff diamond.

The most splendid jewel in the world, however, is not a rock, nor a diamond, but a pearl. Jesus calls it the Pearl of Great Price: "... The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matthew 13:45-46).

He declares that a man is wise who sells all he has in order to purchase that pearl. It is the Pearl of

Salvation, and the poorest man in the world may purchase it as easily as a king on his throne, but the conditions are always the same, the surrender of the whole heart and life to Jesus

Charles Spurgeon in a sermon said, "Truth may be compared to some cave or grotto, with wondrous stalactites reaching from the roof, and others reaching from the floor, a cavern glittering with spar and abounding in marvels.

Before entering the cavern you enquire for a guide, who comes with his lighted torch. He conducts you down to a considerable depth, and you find yourself in the midst of the cave. He leads you through different chambers. Here he points you to a little stream rushing from amid the rocks and indicates its rise and progress.

There he points to some peculiar rock and tells you its name, then takes you into a large natural hall, tells you how many persons once feasted in it, and so on.

Truth is a grand series of caverns, it is our glory to have so great and wise a conductor as the Holy Spirit. Imagine that we are coming to the darkness of it. He is a light shining in the midst of us to guide us.

And by the light he shows us wonderful things. He teaches us by suggestion, direction, and illumination."

Before we leave our thoughts on truth being like a rock, remember that a rock is hard and can hurt us if we are hit by it. Accepting the truth can sometimes be hard and may hurt.

Harry S. Truman said, "I never give them hell. I just tell the truth and they think it's hell".

Noah's message during the building of the ark was not, "Something good is going to happen to you." He condemned the world and was a preacher of righteousness.

Jeremiah was not put into a miry pit for preaching, "I'm okay, you're okay." It was for crying against the adultery, idolatry and other wickedness of his nation.

John the Baptist's message from the wilderness was not, "Smile, God loves you." It was "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come."

Jesus Christ was not crucified for saying,

"Consider the lilies, how they grow," but for saying, "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites...children of hell ...fools and blind guides ... whited sepulchres...generation of vipers."

Winston Churchill said, "Men occasionally stumble over the truth, most pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing has happened".

We must choose to desire it, want to read it, seek to know it, and decide to live it.

David Lemmons wrote, 'A little girl, being asked by a priest to attend religious instruction, refused, saying it was against her father's wishes.

The priest said she should obey him, not her father. "Oh! Sir! We are taught in the Bible to 'Honor thy father and thy mother,'" she replied. (*1)

"But you are to call me, Father," was his answer, to which she replied, "No, for the scriptures say, 'Call no man your father upon the earth for one is your father, which is in heaven.'" (*2)

The priest was not anxious to lose a religious discussion to one so young and he said, "You have no business reading the Bible."

"Then why did Jesus tell me to 'Search the Scriptures?'" she asked. (*3)

He replied by saying, "But that is only to the clergy. You understand that a little child cannot know the scriptures."

"Then why, "she asked," did Paul write to Timothy, 'From a little child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures'?" (*4)

Surely there was some way to get the best of this young upstart. Said the priest, "Timothy was being trained to be a bishop and he was taught by the church authorities."

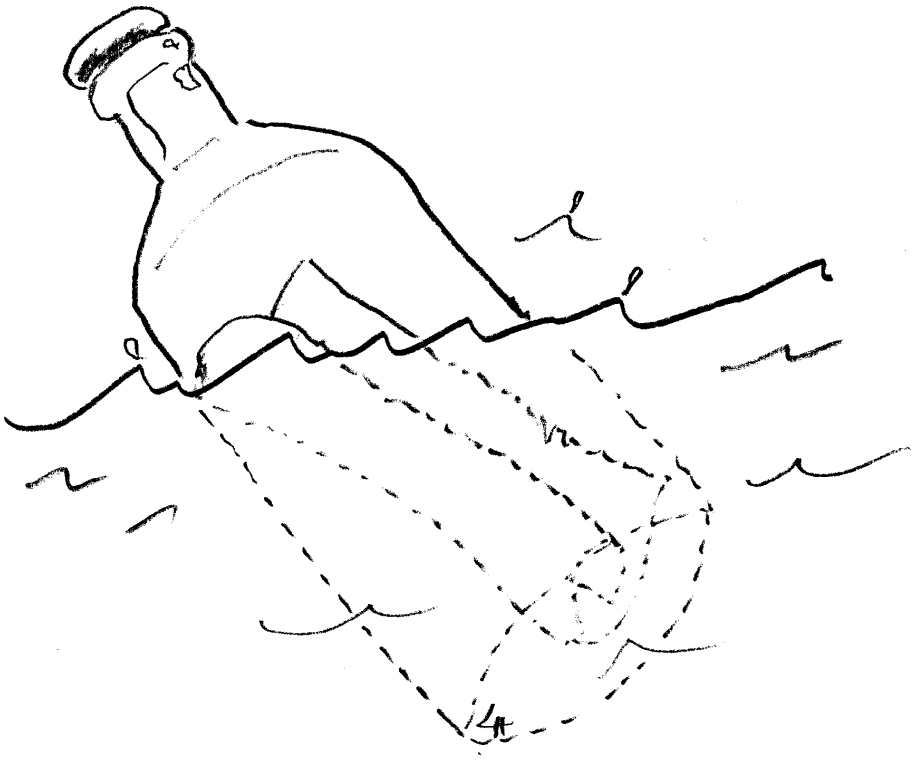
"No sir," said the little girl, "He was taught by his mother and grandmother. At least that's what Paul wrote."(*5)

The priest turned away and someone said they heard him mumbling something about "she knew enough Bible to poison a whole parish".'

References: (1) "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Exodus 20:12).
(2) "And call no man your father upon the earth: for

one is your Father, which is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9).
(3) "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).
(4) "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).
(5) "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (2 Timothy 1:5).

To transition our thoughts into the next chapter (The Bottle), consider these words by James Smith, "Before colours can be fixed in glass it must be subjected to a most powerful heat, then the glass may be broken in pieces, but the results of the fire can never perish. Some truths need to be burned into us, for this purpose the furnace of affliction is frequently used".



Chapter 2: The Bottle

The Greek word for "truth" used in the Bible is the word *alathea* from which I picture the image of a bottle.

Alathea means "open to view", "transparent", or "not concealed". Truth hides nothing.

Truth is as transparent as a bottle. And yet a bottle is a poor analogy for truth, as a bottle is fragile, easily broken, easily destroyed.

However God can still use the fragments of truth. God uses broken things. It takes broken soil to produce a crop, broken clouds to produce rain, broken grain to give bread and broken bread to give strength.

It is the broken alabaster box that gives forth perfume.

It is the broken Peter, weeping bitterly, who returns to greater power than ever.

During the Second World War my father, along with other soldiers in his infantry regiment (and I guess many others) were issued with compact Bibles

containing the New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs, along with the hymns 'Rock of Ages' and 'Abide with Me'.

These little 'Testaments' as they were called, were made of rice paper to make them light to carry and cheap to produce during a time of rationing.

Many soldiers in the trenches where my father was encamped tore pages from these to use as cigarette papers to roll dried grasses into cigarettes.

Even though my father had been a smoker since age 6, I know that his "Testament' remained intact, as he gave it to me after the war. It was returned by the Red Cross in a package of his belongings after he was freed from a Prisoner-of-War camp.

Although my father was very reticent to talk of any of his wartime experiences, I do remember well one story that he told.

It was of a day that he heard the sound of crying and saw that it came from a man slouched at one end of the trench with his head down and his head in his hands.

My father approached him and asked the obvious questions. The man showed him a fragment of rice paper

that someone had discarded after rolling a cigarette from the rest of the page.

I was never told what was written on that tiny fragment from the Bible, but the man explained that, having read it, he was convicted of his need of salvation and had just given his life to God. Obviously this fragment was the key to his salvation.

Sometimes a fragment is all it takes.

Alastair Kendrew of the New Zealand Salvation Army, tells us that, in the 1830s there was a Maori girl called Tarore who lived in the Waikato district of New Zealand.

Tarore was about 12 years old. Her father, Ngakuku, was a rangatira (a chief).

Tarore learned about Jesus at a mission school set up by a Reverend Alfred Brown. She learnt that Jesus was different and had great mana. But Jesus didn't fight back, even when his enemies were going to kill him. Instead, Tarore learned, Jesus loved people.

From the Bible, Tarore learned that Jesus helped people love each other and taught them to love God. She learnt that Jesus was the Son of God, and that he

died on a cross and was raised back to life. She learned that, by his death and rising to life again, Jesus defeated the dark powers of the world and made it possible for us to be right with God. Tarore decided to follow Jesus.

At this time the first parts of the Maori Bible were being printed. One of the first was *Te Rongopai a Ruka* (the Gospel of Luke). The Browns gave a copy to Tarore. As she read from her book to her people, Ngakuku her father stood nearby and listened to his daughter.

Because of some safety issues Ngakuku decided to take his young people over the Kaimai Mountains to Tauranga.

They stopped to spend the night by the Wairere Falls. During the night warriors from another tribe attacked the group.

Ngakuku was instantly awake and led the group into the bush to escape. But where was Tarore?

When it was safe, Ngakuku went back, afraid about what he would find.

By a tree where she had slept, Tarore lay dead. Ngakuku wept.

"Revenge!" cried others in the group."

And that is what they would be expected to cry. Revenge or '*utu*' was, at this time, an integral part of Maori Law related to the maintenance of Tribal Mana. One of the earliest precepts instilled into a Maori child was "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." Whose eye, or whose tooth, didn't matter very much.

If a man failed to respond in that way, he was deemed *wawau* (misguided), and his friends would then act for him, to save the honour of the tribe.

"Revenge!" cried others in the group."

"No!" said Ngakuku, "there's been enough killing!"

"Where is Tarore's book?" someone asked. It had been taken by the warrior who had killed Tarore.

One of his tribe was able to translate the words. As he listened he felt that the words were a special message to him: Luke 6: 27-28, "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

The warrior was convicted in his heart by the Holy Spirit and sent a message to Ngakuku asking for forgiveness.

Before the coming of the Gospel that would have been impossible. It would not and could not have happened. But Ngakuku had a very different point of view now. He followed Jesus now and so he paid the cost of not seeking revenge. He forgave the warrior and welcomed him as a brother in Christ. Could a Maori father pay a greater cost? No!

Rev Brown records in his journal that, in 1842, Ngakuku and the warrior met: "In the evening, they were engaged together in worshiping God at their prayer meeting and were apparently on the friendliest terms. Who but the Christian loves their enemies?" wrote Brown.

The post script to this is that six years later Bishop Selwyn took his missionary journey through New Zealand. No European missionary had been to the South Island, but Selwyn found the people living in peace and following Jesus. Many people had learned to read and write. The only textbook they had known was Tarore's Gospel of Luke and two pages from the Maori Prayer book.

A fragment is all it takes.

Inmates at Santa Rita County Jail used Bible paper to roll their marijuana joints with, because it was better than any other paper available.

There was this guy going around asking all of the Christians if he could tear a piece of paper from a page in their Bible so he could roll a joint. No one would let him.

Later on, some Christian had left his Bible unattended on a table for a few minutes. After returning, he discovered that some parts from Romans chapter six had been torn out, in the size of a sheet of cigarette rolling paper.

Another inmate found a piece of the torn-out Bible page on the floor that hadn't been rolled into a joint. While attempting to roll it around some 'weed' he read, "22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. 23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

This fragment of truth changed his life forever.

It is only a fragment of humanity that is referred to in Romans 9:27 and Revelation 12:17 as a Remnant, that remain faithful and true to the end.

When I worked as the curator of the South Seas Islands Museum in Cooranbong, New South Wales, I held in my hand what has been referred to as 'The Bounty Bible'.

My friend Bob (Robert H) Pierson explained its significance. As Fletcher Christian, mutineer on the Bounty, began his life of isolation on Pitcairn Island, he discovered his mother's Bible in the bottom of his sea chest. He began taking it to a certain cave, spending hours reading its sacred pages.

John Adams found him there one day, and asked to join him in his study; hence Fletcher Christian read often to John Adams.

Later when violence swept the island, Christian was killed, but the desire for Bible study had been planted deep in the heart of John Adams. He took Fletcher Christian's Bible and became the spiritual father and leader of the sons and daughters of the mutineers.

The Bounty Bible, as it was later called, became their guiding light, and through its teachings came peace, education, industry, love, and a simple Bible faith, which has blessed the inhabitants of Pitcairn for generations.

We often discard or recycle bottles, considering the content to be of more value than the casing. When it comes to biblical truth both the casing (the Bible) and the content (God's Word) are all truth.

Note however, that while everything in the Bible is true, not everything in the Bible is 'the' truth. For example, it is not true that the image of Artemis fell down from heaven as we read in Acts 19:35, but it is true that the city clerk at Ephesus said that it did. It is also not true that there is a place beneath the surface of the earth called Sheol, but it is true that the Hebrews believed in Sheol.

The content of the Bible falls into three categories: The One who brings salvation, the message of salvation and the people who received salvation.

Truth is built on the first two (the God-Man and His message) and never on the last one (the descriptions of the acts of imperfect people).

Sometimes we have to work hard to piece together what is truth, but the rewards are eternal.

John Chapman, a tinker, of Surrey had a dream three nights running. It told him that if he went to London Bridge he would meet someone who would give him something of great value.

After waiting all day at the bridge a merchant from a nearby store, who had seen him pacing the bridge all day asked his purpose. He told the merchant of his dream and his pending disbelief due to his long wait.

The merchant reinforced the thought of disbelief saying that if he believed in dreams he would be down in Surrey digging under the oak tree of a Mr John Chapman, looking for treasure.

Whereupon Mr. Chapman thanked the merchant for his advice and promptly returned home, and started digging under his tree. After much digging he found however no treasure, only an old clay pot with some unknown languages written upon it.

Disheartened, he put it in his tinker's shop window. After several months a customer offered him a small sum for it, which he took. Before the customer

left however, John Chapman asked him of the writing. The customer replied, "It reads 'The deeper you dig the more you get' "

John Chapman pondered on this and promptly went out and dug deeper.

After a time he came upon an old metal chest containing much treasure, much of which he spent on establishing a local church, as it was God who had guided him to it.

So with our life and study: The deeper we dig, the more we get.

A young New Zealand boy found a message in a bottle washed up on a beach, 25 years after a girl threw it into the ocean from the same spot.

Kylie Tatham-Tahere, now married with three children, threw the bottle into the ocean from Cooks Beach when she was eight and forgot about it.

Eight-year-old Tom Hussona from Auckland found it on Christmas Day 2009. His mum Erica said the bottle was intact but the lid had rusted and water had got in.

'The message was just in hundreds of bits,' she told the Waikato Times. 'The paper was so delicate...we had to try to get between the folds and unravel it with toothpicks.' They had to work hard to piece it together.

They managed to read Kylie Tatham-Tahere's name and tracked her down through the *Old Friends* website.

Kylie said she was 'blown away' when she got a text message from Tom's mum. They met up and are planning to holiday together regularly at the beach.

Tom has also released his own message in a bottle stoppered with a wax-sealed cork to stop any water getting in.

Sometimes we have to work hard to piece together what is truth, but we are promised, "seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7 and Luke 11:9).

John 8:32 says, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free".

Maurice A Fetty wrote, "Truth is hard to find these days. We struggle with truth in advertising, truth in labelling, truth in packaging, as well as truth in

medicine, law, business and even religion. Even the clergy are more suspect than ever before. Truth is hard to find these days".

In order to obtain the truth we must, however be honest in our reading. A little boy who for the first time saw the sign "Common," in Boston at the entrance of the large park known as Boston Common, called out joyfully, "It doesn't say, 'Keep Off the Grass'; it says, "Come on!"

David Lemmons noted that people have a tendency to change the truth according to circumstances. He gives as an example the Gospel that Paul talks about when addressing the Galatians.

Paul wrote in Galatians 1:8, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

This letter of Paul was addressed to the churches of the region of Galatia. The people of this region were mainly Gauls (French). We can better understand what Paul has written in this section if we consider something of the character of these Christians.

Julius Caesar said about these people: "The infirmity of the Gauls is that they are fickle in their resolves and fond of change, and not to be trusted."

There are other quotes from other sources which recognize this general trait or characteristic that had been observed historically. It seems to be generally true that this was an identifiable trait of this group of people in that period of time.

This relates to the statement of Paul in verse six that he marvelled that they were so soon removed from the teaching he had done while in their midst. The fickleness, or the idea of being fond of change, may help to explain why they had so quickly been drawn away from Paul's true teaching to another gospel.

The Galatians had accepted Paul and had received the commands and instructions which he presented to them from the Lord.

They had done so with confidence at first. An indication of this is seen in Galatians 4:14-15, "And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible,

ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me."

They were so receptive when Paul was among them that they seemed to him to be willing to sacrifice to a very large degree in order to be helpful to him, who had taught them the truth.

The sad thing is, and the thing which made Paul marvel, is that when the Judaizing teachers had come to them with a perverted and valueless substitute for the gospel, requiring them to be circumcised, they also received that perverted gospel.

Paul therefore writes this letter in order to overcome the influence of these false teachers and to establish his apostleship. Paul very plainly and forcefully states that no one has the authority to preach any gospel other than that which has been revealed.

In verse eight Paul writes: "But though we, or an angel from heaven..." Paul here supposes an impossibility, in order to make his point to these brethren.

Paul uses the word angel to make a very strong point that it matters not who it is that preaches a

perverted gospel. This very concise statement will include all men, even Paul himself.

He continues: "...should preach any other gospel unto you...". That would specifically be any gospel not dependent upon the grace of God.

Those Judaizing teachers tried to make salvation dependent upon the fleshly covenant of circumcision. Others may make different changes, but none of the changed gospels is to be accepted.

At the beginning, near the middle, and at the ending of God's written revelation to man, He makes clear that no additions nor subtractions are to be allowed"

Deuteronomy 4:2, "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you."

Proverbs 30:6, "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."

Revelation 22:18-19, "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add

unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

Also Jude 3 makes plain that the gospel has now been once and for all delivered.

And Paul continues by writing: "...than that which we preached unto you..."

Paul preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:1-5). He preached belief in and confession of Christ (Romans 10:9-10). He preached repentance from sin (Acts 17:30).

Paul preached baptism into Christ (Galatians 3:27). He preached that submission to the gospel of Christ makes a "new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The gospel Paul preached was a distinctive one and a universal one that could be understood easily.

Paul wrote for that one who makes changes in the gospel he preached: "...let him be anathema..."

Paul devotes any who would pervert the gospel

of Christ to destruction.

Consider some of the many passages from God's revelation about the utterly repulsive nature of false teaching (Jeremiah 23:2; 50:6; Titus 1:10-11; Romans 16:17-18; 2 John 9-11; Matthew 7:22-23).

Paul uses a very strong term in this verse to indicate the greatest possible abhorrence of any attempt to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Any person who would be a teacher of God's word certainly ought to have this passage before him constantly.

There is but one gospel. It is not possible to preach a changed gospel and still be pleasing to God.

We need to understand clearly that a solemn and serious responsibility rests upon the shoulders of all who would teach the word of God: "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation" (James 3:1).

Chapter 3: The Glue

The Latin word for "truth" is "*veritas*", which means "rigid"' "unmoveable", or "sticks like glue".

From this word we get the word "verify" which means "to check against truth", and the word "verified" which means "proven".

Glue is the best analogy for truth so far, because glue not only holds fast, it suggests that something would fall apart without it.

Indeed, truth is a cement for every relationship, both the secular and the sacred.

And yet, once again our analogy has its limitations.

You can't store truth in a tube and only use it when things have fallen apart.

Sometimes only a tiny drop of glue is needed to repair something. Sometimes we think that only a tiny drop of truth is needed to get us by in life.

A while ago I was making a purchase in a local shop and the checkout girl was about to undercharge me 50¢.

When I drew her attention to this she remarked that I was 'very honest'. I responded by saying that there is no such thing as being very honest. Either a person is honest or they are dishonest. There are no degrees of honesty, just as there is no such thing as a white lie or a black lie, as all lying is dishonest.

She remarked that I could have just forgotten about the 50¢ and walked out of the shop.

'Oh no, I couldn't', I replied, 'If my God-given sense of honesty didn't stop me, my conscience would.'

Austin O'Malley wrote that "Those that think it permissible to tell white lies soon grow colour-blind".

Myron F. Boyd observed, "A half-truth is a dangerous thing, especially if you have got hold of the wrong half."

The theologian John R. W. Stott wrote, "Balanced biblical Christianity is a rare phenomenon. It seems to be a characteristic of our fallen minds that we find it easier to grasp half-truths than to grasp the

whole truth, and in consequence we become lopsided Christians."

When we hear a half-truth do we turn a blind eye? *Turning a blind eye* is an idiom describing the ignoring of undesirable information.

The phrase to turn a blind eye is attributed to an incident in the life of Admiral Horatio Nelson.

Nelson was blinded in one eye early in his Royal Navy career. In 1801, during the Battle of Copenhagen cautious Admiral Sir Hyde Parker, in overall command of the British forces, sent a signal to Nelson's forces giving him discretion to withdraw.

Naval orders were transmitted via a system of signal flags at that time. When this order was given to the more aggressive Nelson's attention, he lifted his telescope up to his blind eye, said (honestly), "I really do not see the signal", and his forces continued to press home the attack.

Despite the popular belief that he was disobeying orders, the signal gave Nelson permission to withdraw at his discretion.

Even at the time, some of the people on his ship

may have believed otherwise as they were unaware of the exact content of the signal.

Someone has said, "The teeth may be false, but be sure the tongue is true."

Ephesians 4:25 says, "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another".

Two farmers were chatting in front of the bank. "I hear you made $60,000 in alfalfa," said the first.

Not wishing to be impolite his friend replied, "Well, that isn't quite right. It wasn't me, it was my brother, it wasn't alfalfa, but oats; not $60,000 but $6,000; and he didn't make it, he lost it."

Now just as truth can be used as a weapon glue can also be used for negative purposes.

In 2008 a 10-year-old Mexican boy glued his hand to his bed to avoid going back to school after the Christmas break

"I thought if I was glued to the bed, they couldn't make me go to school," the boy, Diego, said. "I didn't want to go, the holidays were so much fun. I

remembered my mom had bought a very strong glue," he said of the industrial strength shoe glue he used to stick his hand to the bed's metal headboard, where he stayed stuck for two hours.

His mother Sandra Palacios was unable to free him and called paramedics and police to help. Diego watched cartoons while they worked to unglue him, eventually using a spray to dissolve the chemical adhesive. Diego eventually made it to school only a few hours late.

Do we use the truth to hurt or to heal? Often it is better to say nothing than to wound with words, just because they are true.

The editor of a small-town newspaper grew tired of being called a liar, and announced that he would tell the truth in the future.

The next issue contained the following item: *"Married-Miss Sylvan Rhodes and James Collins, last Saturday at the Baptist parsonage, by the Rev. J. Gordon. The bride is a very ordinary town girl, who doesn't know any more about cooking than a jackrabbit, and never helped her mother three days in her life. She is not a beauty by any means and has*

a gait like a duck. The groom is an up-to-date loafer. He has been living off the old folks at home all his life and is now worth shucks. It will be a hard life."

Another limitation with using glue as a symbol for truth is the fact that it hardens.

This is reflected in the child's joke that says that a local factory was robbed last week and a quantity of wood glue was stolen. Police say that they are looking for a gang of hardened criminals.

Glue hardens and yet truth applied in love can soften even the most hardened criminals.

Truth exists; only falsehood has to be invented.

People cannot change the truth, but the truth can change people.

Oscar Cervantes is a dramatic example of the power of God's truth to transform lives.

As a child, Oscar began to get into trouble. Then as he got older, he was jailed 17 times for brutal crimes. Prison psychiatrists said he was beyond help.

But they were wrong! During a brief interval of

freedom, Oscar met an elderly man who told him the truth about Jesus.

He believed the truth, placed his trust in the Lord and was changed into a kind, caring man.

Shortly afterward he started a prison ministry.

Chaplain H. C. Warwick describes it this way: "The third Saturday night of each month is 'Oscar Night' at Soledad. Inmates come to hear Oscar and they sing gospel songs with fervour; they sit intently for over 2 hours; they come freely to the chapel altar."

What professionals had failed to do for Oscar in years of counselling, the Spirit of Truth did in a moment of conversion.

Truth

Chapter 4: What is Truth?

The English word for truth, according to the Concise Oxford English Dictionary is (wait for it …) *truth*.

Truth, according to this source is a noun describing what is true or the quality or a state of being true or truthful.

There are those who have only a dictionary knowledge of the truth.

In all human experience a theoretical knowledge of the truth has been proved to be insufficient for the saving of the soul. It does not bring forth the fruits of righteousness.

There are those who have a careless disregard for the truth.

I think of the question asked by Pontius Pilate, that most notable Roman of them all, "What is truth?"

I think that John's gospel (the only one in which this scene appears) means us to take Pilate's question as purely rhetorical.

John 18:37-38, "Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all."

Pilate's rejoinder to Jesus is sarcastic and dismissive. Truth, whatever it might be, was not one of the things that interested Pontius Pilate very much.

There are those who are very flexible with the truth.

To please his father a first year college student elected for track-and-field events. He had no athletic ability, though the father had been a good runner in his day. His first race was a two-man race in which he ran against the school champion.

He was badly beaten. Not wanting to disappoint his father, the boy wrote home as follows: "You will be happy to know that I ran against Bill Williams, the best runner in college. He came in next to last, while I came in second."

There are those who know about the truth but blatantly disregard it.

Some time ago a flyer from a local church was letterboxed in our street inviting people to visit their 'special community.'

They listed the ways they were unique: *"No religious dogma-We encourage the freedom of individual thought and belief. A humanist view of life-Our faith is based on celebrating the inherent worth and dignity of every person. Warm, accessible services-*

Our Sunday services … typically include a mix of readings, music, moments of meditation or contemplation, and a sermon. …

[In] our children's religious education program we teach our kids to be accepting of differing beliefs and the importance of each person seeking his or her own truth. They study the world's major religions and draw on the core values of each faith tradition. …

So if you're looking for a congregation that cherishes freedom of belief and opinion, with a warm sense of community and fellowship, please visit us!"

What I have shared with you is nothing more or less than an invitation to visit a group where truth doesn't matter.

There are those who apparently don't know what truth is.

Coming home from work, a woman stopped at the corner deli to buy a chicken for supper.

The butcher reached into an ice barrel, grabbed the last chicken he had, flung it on the scales behind the counter, and told the woman its weight.

She thought for a moment. "I really need a bit more chicken than that," she said. "Do you have any larger ones?"

Without a word, the butcher put the chicken back into the barrel, groped around as though finding another, pulled the same chicken out, and placed it on the scales.

"This chicken weighs one pound more," he announced.

The woman pondered her options and then said, "Okay. I'll take them both."

There are those who stand by the truth.

A small boy was on the witness stand in an important lawsuit.

The prosecuting attorney cross-examined him, then delivered, he thought, a crushing blow to the testimony.

"Your father has been telling you how to testify, has he not?"

"Yes," the lad replied and did not hesitate with the answer.

"Now," said the lawyer triumphantly, "just tell us how your father told you to testify."

"Well," the boy said modestly, "Father told me the lawyers would try to tangle me in my testimony, but if I would just be careful to tell the truth, I could repeat the same thing every time."

There are others who live by the truth.

Monica Miller wrote, 'My husband Gene and I volunteered to help out on the early shift at a charity golf tournament. It was 6 a.m. when we left the house

and the streets were deserted. At one intersection, the traffic light was turning yellow. Instead of slowing down, Gene gunned it.

The light changed red just as we went through it. Instantly we heard a siren and saw blue lights flashing. Gene hadn't noticed the policeman following him.

As we pulled over, the officer approached us shaking his head. "You had plenty of time to stop for that light," he growled.

Without hesitating, Gene answered, "You're absolutely right, Officer."

After a fleeting look of surprise, the policeman folded his ticket book, put it in his back pocket and said, "Your honesty just saved you a ticket. Nine people out of ten would have said the light was still yellow when they went through."

Shaking Gene's hand, the policeman smiled and waved us on our way.'

And there are those who would rather defend the truth.

A pastor was walking across town when he came

upon a group of about a dozen little boys in a side alley. The group of kids surrounded a dog.

The pastor went over and asked, "What are you doing with that dog?"

One of the boys replied, "This dog is just an old neighbourhood stray. We all want him, but only one of us can take him home.

So we've decided that whichever one of us can tell the biggest lie will get to keep the dog."

Of course, the reverend was taken aback. "You boys shouldn't be having a contest telling lies!" he exclaimed.

He then launched into a ten-minute sermon against lying, beginning, "Don't you boys know it's a sin to lie," and ending with, "Why when I was your age, I never told a lie."

There was dead silence for about a minute.

Just as the reverend was beginning to think he'd gotten through to them, the smallest boy gave a deep sigh and said, "All right, give him the dog."

C S Lewis said that a man can't always be defending the truth; there must be a time to feed on it.

My favourite passage of Scripture is John 14:1-6, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? 6) Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

Note that Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life..." (verse 6).

Thomas a' Kempis, said of Jesus: "Thou art the way, the truth and the life. Without the way, there is no going. Without the truth, there is no knowing. Without the life, there is no living".

The Government Treasury Department has a special group of men whose job it is to track down counterfeiters. They are not trained by spending hours

examining counterfeit money. Rather, they study the real thing. We are not going to understand the Father of truth by listening to the father of lies.

The story is told of an old man who lived on a farm in the mountains of eastern Kentucky with his young grandson.

Each morning, Grandpa was up early sitting at the kitchen table reading from his old worn-out Bible.

His grandson who wanted to be just like him tried to imitate him in any way he could.

One day the grandson asked, "Papa, I try to read the Bible just like you but I don't understand it, and what I do understand I forget as soon as I close the book. What good does reading the Bible do?"

The Grandfather quietly turned from putting coal in the stove and said, "Take this coal basket down to the river and bring back a basket of water."

The boy did as he was told, even though all the water leaked out before he could get back to the house.

The grandfather laughed and said, "You will have to move a little faster next time," and sent him back to

the river with the basket to try again.

This time the boy ran faster, but again the basket was empty before he returned home.

Out of breath, he told his grandfather that it was "impossible to carry water in a basket," and he went to get a bucket instead.

The old man said, "I don't want a bucket of water; I want a basket of water. You can do this. You're just not trying hard enough," and he went out the door to watch the boy try again.

At this point, the boy knew it was impossible, but he wanted to show his grandfather that even if he ran as fast as he could, the water would leak out before he got far at all.

The boy scooped the water and ran hard, but when he reached his grandfather the basket was again empty. Out of breath, he said, "See Papa, it's useless!"

"So you think it is useless?" The old man said, "Look at the basket."

The boy looked at the basket and for the first time he realized that the basket looked different. Instead

of a dirty old coal basket, it was clean.

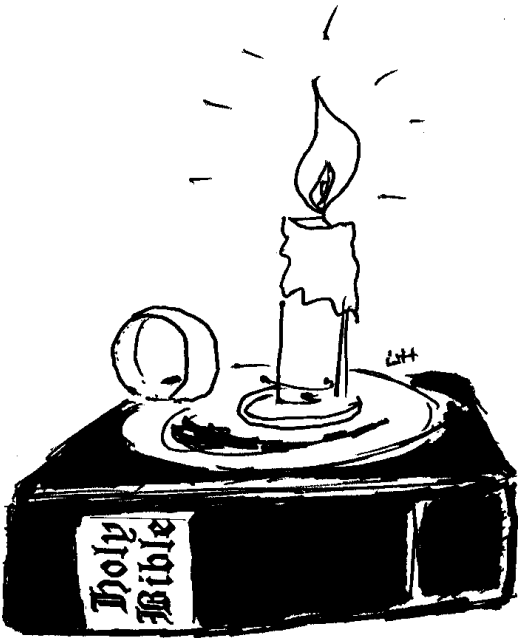
"Son, that's what happens when you read the Bible. You might not understand or remember everything, but when you read it, it will change you from the inside out.

That is the work of God in our lives. To change us from the inside out and to slowly transform us into the image of His Son.

So let's summarise what we have investigated in chapters 1-3.

Truth can be as immovable as a rock Truth can be as transparent as a bottle. Truth can be as vital as a tube of glue. But there is only one true representation of truth and that is Jesus Christ.

I invite you to commit or recommit to him now. Though no one can go back and make a brand new beginning, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending.


Holy
Bible

Chapter 5: Getting Your Words Worth

Robert Sumner, in an article headed, 'He Reads His Bible With His Lips," wrote about William McPherson.

William was severely injured when a charge of dynamite exploded in front of his face. Although he survived the blast, he lost both hands, both eyes, and the feeling in parts of his face.

He was a new Christian and he realized how much the Bible meant to him. He needed its strength now more than ever, but he couldn't read it.

William heard that a woman in Britain had learned to read Braille with her lips, so he ordered portions of the Bible in Braille. When it arrived, he was dismayed to discover that the explosion had deadened the nerves in his lips so that no sense of touch remained.

But then he found his tongue was able to feel the raised dots. Although the metal left his lips and tongue bleeding and very sore, he prayed to God to help him continue to learn just one letter of the alphabet.

A teacher was able to help him learn the *Moon Type* system of Braille, which uses simplified figures instead of dots.

In the 65 years that followed, this Kansas City man read the Bible through four times with his tongue. How much effort do you put into reading God's Word?

There is a basic difference between an explorer and a tourist. The tourist travels quickly, stopping only to observe the highly noticeable or publicized points of interest. The explorer, on the other hand, takes his time to search out all that he can find.

Too many of us read the Bible like a tourist and then complain that our devotional times are fruitless.

It is necessary that we take time to explore the Bible. Notable nooks and crannies will appear as we get beneath the surface.

Acts 17:10-12, "And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things

were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few."

Berea was a city about 50 miles southwest of Thessalonica. It was an out-of- the-way city not on the Egnatian Way.

This was a beautiful city in the mountains and had many gorgeous gardens, due to the abundance of water in this area.

Above all, Berea was a city where the aristocracy lived. It was like a retirement centre for wealthy military, political and educational leaders.

When Paul arrived in Berea, he went immediately into the synagogue, keeping with his game plan. He says of the attendees of the synagogue in Berea that they were "more noble-minded" than the synagogue attendees in Thessalonica. The Greek literally says "more noble." This means that the Bereans were of a more noble class than those in Thessalonica. That refers to social nobility.

However, it also means that they were more noble in quality of mind and heart. They were more

generous, liberal and gracious in their feelings and more ready to inquire candidly into the truth of the doctrine Paul and Silas were advancing.

The Bereans were highly educated people and they were open-minded to what Paul had to say.

The synagogue attendees in Thessalonica were uncritical in their thinking, prejudiced to the truth, more emotional and impulsive towards the gospel.

The Bereans were much more willing to deal objectively with the facts of the gospel as they were proclaimed by Paul.

I like what the author of 'Acts of the Apostles', page 232, says of their example to us: "The minds of the Bereans were not narrowed by prejudice. They were willing to investigate the truthfulness of the doctrines preached by the apostles. They studied the Bible, not from curiosity, but in order that they might learn what had been written concerning the promised Messiah. Daily they searched the inspired records, and as they compared scripture with scripture, heavenly angels were beside them, enlightening their minds and impressing their hearts."

Corine Gatti in a paper entitled, 'Has America Lost Its Passion For The Bible?' she asserts that a recent survey shows that thirty-nine percent of respondents who are under the age of twenty-nine have never read the Bible. She says that in just three years, the number of Christians who are apathetic about the Bible grew ten percent.

Consider this piece of Christian doggerel:
"On the table side by side, the Holy Bible and the TV Guide, One is well worn, but cherished with pride, but one is used daily, to help folks decide. No! It isn't the Bible, it's the TV Guide."

"As the pages are turned, what shall they see? Oh! It doesn't matter, just turn on the TV. Then confusion is started, for they can't all agree on what they shall watch on the old TV. So they refer to the book, in which they all confide. But it isn't the Bible, it's the TV Guide. "

"The Word of God, is seldom read, maybe a verse, before they fall into bed. Exhausted and sleepy, and tired as can be, not from reading the Bible, but from watching TV. Then back to the table, side by side, The Holy Bible, and the TV Guide. "

"No time for prayer, no time for the Word, the plan of salvation is seldom heard. Forgiveness of sins, so full and free, we find in the Bible, and not the TV."

I used this illustration in a sermon over forty years ago, yet nowadays people don't read the Bible or the TV Guide. They mindlessly use a button on their remote control or 'surf' the internet on their mobile electronic devices.

I received a letterbox card in my mailbox advising that the local newspaper would no longer be available in a printed edition and encouraged readers to subscribe to the publisher's online digital edition.

Newspapers are dying, publishers are going bankrupt while everything is going electronic.

I sat on a bus stop recently, where I would usually strike up a conversation with a fellow passenger and steer it around to spiritual matters.

However on this occasion there was a bevy of young university students who, instead of making conversation with each other, sat silently with their eyes fixed upon their individual hand-held devices, staring at the little screens while their thumbs danced in double-

quick time across the keypads.

See how minutia has taken over our lives instead of substance. Reading a book like the Bible takes effort and discipline, which is in short supply these days.

Charles Spurgeon wrote "To some the Bible is uninteresting and unprofitable because they read too fast. Among the insects that subsist on the sweet sap of flowers, there are two very different classes.

One is remarkable for its imposing plumage; and as you watch its jaunty gyrations over the fields, and its dance from flower to flower, you cannot help admiring its graceful activity.

But in the same field there is another worker, whose brown vest and businesslike straight-forward flight may not have arrested your eye."

"His fluttering neighbour darts down here and there, and sips elegantly wherever he can find a drop of ready nectar; but this dingy plodder makes a point of alighting everywhere, and wherever he alights he either finds honey or makes it.

He explores all about till he discovers it, and then having ascertained the knack of it, joyful as one

who has found great spoil, he sings his way down into its luscious recesses."

"His rival, of the painted velvet wing, has no patience for such dull and long-winded details. But the one died last October along with the flowers, while the other is warm in his hive tonight, amid the fragrant stores which he gathered beneath the bright beams of summer."

James Hamilton, asks, "To which do you belong — the butterflies or the bees? Do you search the Scriptures, or do you only skim them? Do you dwell on a passage till you bring out some meaning, or till you can carry away some memorable truth or immediate lesson? Or do you flit along on heedless wing, only on the lookout for novelty?"

"Does the Word of God dwell in you richly, that in the vigils of a restless night, or in the bookless solitude of a sick room, or in the winter of old age or exclusion from ordinances, its treasured truths would perpetuate summer round you and give you [food] to eat which the world knows not of?"

Irrespective of the material used for the cover, the Bible is, never-the-less a hard book that covers

difficult themes.

Many people have been brought up to have a misty-eyed appreciation for the Bible but have never actually gotten around to reading it. According to her grand-daughter Donna Trussell, 90-year-old Grace Longino decided to do something she'd never done before and that was to read the Bible cover to cover.

She began with the Old Testament, and she didn't get far before she threw it down, exclaiming, "This is a terrible book!"

Penn Jillette, a famous magician and outspoken atheist, was asked to list his favourite books. The final one on his list was the Bible. He said, "If you're considering becoming an atheist, read the Bible from cover to cover. No study guides, no spins, just read it. Sometime between when God tells Abraham to kill his son and when Jesus tells everyone to put him before their families, you will become an atheist".

The Old Testament stories of warfare, adultery, slavery, surrogate motherhood, sacrifice, mass infanticide, atrocities and a harsh-sounding God trip up a lot of people.

If there is something in your life that you know God is against, you won't want to read his book and get reminded of it over and over again.

There is no city in the world, perhaps, where the treasures of art are more appreciated than Florence, Italy. It is told that an American visitor to the Pitti Palace, after viewing some of the paintings there, said to his guide: "Are these the great masterpieces that everyone tells me about? I don't see much in them to arouse such enthusiasm."

"It is not these paintings that are on trial sir," the guide answered, "but it is you who view them."

So it is with the Word of God. Sometimes we run across scoffers, men who sneer at divine revelation, who say that they cannot feel much enthusiasm about the Bible.

But the Bible is not on trial. Whether men believe it or not, it is the Word of God, which 1 Peter 1:23 says, "liveth and abideth forever".

Clarence Macartney wrote about the unbelief of the American author and humorist, Mark Twain (1835-1910) .

His real name was Samuel Langhorne Clemens. He is best known for his novels, 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer' and 'The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn'.

He took his pen name from the chant of the riverboat men who measure the depth of the shallow waters of the Mississippi River. When it was two fathoms deep or less they would call out, "Mark Twain".

Twain married Oliva Langdon. She was a simple and devout Christian, but he was not a believer. For a while after they were married, they had prayer at meals and read the Bible each day. But this was soon given up.

According to a conversation she had with her sister, Oliva said she had given up some of her religious beliefs. Her faith was shaken by people, places, and philosophies to which she was exposed as she travelled the world with her husband.

Oliva's pet name for her husband was, "*Youth*." Their only son, Langdon, died in infancy and two of their three daughters — Susy and Jean — died as young women.

During one of those sad times in their lives — it

could have been after the death of one of their children — Twain said to Livy, "If it comforts you to lean on the Christian faith, do so."

"But I can't, Youth; I haven't any," she sadly replied.

Twain felt responsible for causing Livy to lose her faith and the thought came back to haunt him many times after her death in 1904. Mark Twain loved Livy devotedly, but apparently his unbelieving attitude had an effect on her that even he didn't want.

Another biographer tells us that one day Mark Twain took his little daughter upon his knee and told her all about the rulers and other prominent men whom he had met in his travels.

She listened attentively. When he had finished, she said, "Daddy, you know everybody but God, don't you?"

Mark Twain says that he read the Bible looking for loopholes. While troubled by what he read, he said, "It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand."

I will be the first to admit that the Bible contains

difficult texts.

After a certain Thursday afternoon Bible study had finished going through I and II Kings. The group told the leader, "Let's do a nice New Testament book now".

Charles Spurgeon said once, "A neighbour near my study persists in practicing on the flute. He bores my ears as with an auger and renders it almost an impossibility to think. Up and down his scale he runs remorselessly, until even the calamity of temporary deafness would almost be welcome to me."

"Yet he teaches me that I must practice if I would be perfect, must exercise myself unto godliness if I would be skilful, must, in fact, make myself familiar with the word of God, with holy living, and saintly dying. Such practice, moreover, will be as charming as my neighbour's flute is intolerable".

So what do we do with difficult texts?

A clergyman took a seat in a dining car on a train travelling alongside the Hudson River. Opposite him was an atheist who, seeing his clerical collar, started a discussion.

"I see you are a clergyman."

"Yes," came the reply. "I am a minister of the gospel."

"I suppose you believe the Bible."

The clergyman, orthodox in his views, responded, "I certainly do believe the Bible to be the Word of God."

"But aren't there things in the Bible you can't explain?"

With humility the minister answered, "Yes, there are places in the Bible too hard for me to understand."

With an air of triumph as though he had cornered the preacher, the atheist asked, "Well, what do you do then?"

Unruffled, the clergyman went on eating his dinner — which happened to be Hudson shad, a tasty fish but noted for its bony structure.

Looking up, he said, "Sir, I do just the same as when eating this [fish]. When I come to the bones, I put them to the side of the plate and go on enjoying my lunch. I leave the bones for some fool to choke on.

Let me assure you that the God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New, in spite of many supposed discrepancies. (Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever".)

Sometimes discrepancies amount to nothing more than problems in translation.

Zechariah 11:2, "Howl, fir tree; for the cedar is fallen; because the mighty are spoiled: howl, O ye oaks of Bashan; for the forest of the vintage is come down." The King James Version in Zechariah 11:2 calls it a fir tree; the New Revised Standard Version calls it a cypress tree and the New International Version calls it a pine tree.

The meaning of the Hebrew word "*ber-osh*"' is uncertain but refers sometimes to a tree or sometimes a wooden lance or even occasionally a musical instrument made of that wood.

Different words, but all are correct, as the import of this text is not focused on botany, phytology or musicology but legality and judicious sagacity. The text is not telling us about a variety of trees but that God's judgement will certainly fall, even upon nature.

Sometimes our problem is related to taking figurative passages literally

For example Jeremiah 15:16 says, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them", and Job 23:12 says, "Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food."

There are at least eleven other Bible passages that say a similar thing. However, whenever the Ethiopian emperor Menelik II was ill, he'd eat a few pages from the Bible. He believed it would restore his health. He died in 1913 after eating the entire book of Second Kings.

Sometimes our problem with the Bible is simply that we have give up reading it.

A story is told of a devout father whose son was studying for the ministry.

The son decided to go to Europe for an advance degree, and the father worried that his simple faith would be spoiled by sophisticated, unbelieving professors. "Don't let them take Jonah away from you," he admonished, figuring the swallowed-by-a-great-fish

story might be the first part of the Bible to go.

Two years later when the son returned, the father asked, "Do you still have Jonah in your Bible?"

The son laughed. "Jonah! That story isn't even in your Bible!"

The father replied, "It certainly is! What do you mean?"

Again the son laughed and insisted, "It's not in your Bible. Go ahead, show it to me."

The old man fumbled through his Bible, looking for the Book of Jonah, but he couldn't find it. At last he checked the table of contents for the proper page. When he turned there, he discovered the three pages comprising Jonah had been carefully cut from his Bible.

"I did it before I went away," said the son. "What's the difference whether I lose the Book of Jonah through studying under non-believers or you lose it through neglect?"

Eugene H. Peterson wrote, "When we find ourselves deficient in wisdom, it is not because the Word of God has pages missing, but because we have

not seen all there is on the pages we already have. It is not another book we need, but better attention to the book we have; it is not more knowledge we require, but better vision to see what has already been revealed in Jesus Christ".

A New Hebrides chieftain sat peacefully reading the Bible, when he was interrupted by a French trader. "Abruti" he said in French, "why are you reading the Bible? I suppose the missionaries have got hold of you, you poor fool. Throw it way! The Bible never did anybody any good."

The chieftain replied calmly, "if it wasn't for this Bible, you'd be in my kettle there by now!"

The 15th Century Dutch Anabaptist religious leader Menno Simons, the author of the hymn, *'We Are People of God's Peace'* says he was trained to become a priest, but never read the Bible out of fear that "he would be adversely influenced by it".

He later said of that period of his life that he was "stupid".

And now a final thought: Two unbelievers once sat in a railroad train discussing Christ's wonderful life.

Even non-Christians cannot escape thinking of Christ. One said, "I think an interesting romance could be written about Him."

The other replied, "You are just the man to write it. Set forth the correct view of His life and character. Tear down the prevailing sentiment as to His divinity and paint Him as He was: a man among men."

The suggestion was acted upon and the romance was written. The man who made the suggestion was Colonel Ingersoll; the author was General Lew Wallace, and the book was *Ben Hur*.

In the process of constructing it, General Wallace found himself facing the unaccountable Man. The more he studied His life and character, the more profoundly he was convinced that the Christ was more than a man among men; until at length, like the centurion under the cross, he was constrained to cry, "Verily, this was the Son of God."

Appendix: A child's view

I wonder how often we take for granted that children understand what they are reading.

Here is the Bible in a nutshell through the eyes of a child:

"In the beginning, which occurred near the start, there was nothing but God, darkness, and some gas. The Bible says, 'The Lord thy God is one, but I think He must be a lot older than that.

Anyway, God said, 'Give me a light!' and someone did.

Then God made the world.

He split the Adam and made Eve. Adam and Eve were naked, but they weren't embarrassed because mirrors hadn't been invented yet.

Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating one bad apple, so they were driven from the Garden of Eden.....Not sure what they were driven in though, because they didn't have cars.

Adam and Eve had a son, Cain, who hated his brother as long as he was Abel.

Pretty soon all of the early people died off, except for Methuselah, who lived to be like a million or something.

One of the next important people was Noah, who was a good guy, but one of his kids was kind of a Ham. Noah built a large boat and put his family and some animals on it. He asked some other people to join him, but they said they would have to take a rain check.

After Noah came Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jacob was more famous than his brother, Esau, because Esau sold Jacob his birthmark in exchange for some pot roast. Jacob had a son named Joseph who wore a really loud sports coat.

Another important Bible guy is Moses, whose real name was Charlton Heston. Moses led the Israel Lights out of Egypt and away from the evil Pharaoh after God sent ten plagues on Pharaoh's people. These plagues included frogs, mice, lice, bowels, and no cable TV.

God fed the Israel Lights every day with

manicotti. Then he gave them His Top Ten Commandments. These include: don't lie, cheat, smoke, dance, or covet your neighbor's stuff.

Oh, yeah, I just thought of one more: Humour thy father and thy mother.

One of Moses' best helpers was Joshua who was the first Bible guy to use spies. Joshua fought the battle of Geritol and the fence fell over on the town.

After Joshua came David. He got to be king by killing a giant with a slingshot. He had a son named Solomon who had about 300 wives and 500 porcupines. My teacher says he was wise, but that doesn't sound very wise to me.

After Solomon there were a bunch of major league prophets. One of these was Jonah, who was swallowed by a big whale and then barfed up on the shore.

There were also some minor league prophets, but I guess we don't have to worry about them.

After the Old Testament came the New Testament. Jesus is the star of the New Testament. He was born in Bethlehem in a barn. (I wish I had been

born in a barn too, because my mum is always saying to me, 'Close the door! Were you born in a barn?' It would be nice to say, 'As a matter of fact, I was.')

During His life, Jesus had many arguments with sinners like the Pharisees and the Democrats.

Jesus also had twelve opossums.

The worst one was Judas Asparagus. Judas was so evil that they named a terrible vegetable after him.

Jesus was a great man. He healed many leopards and even preached to some Germans on the Mount.

But all those guys put Jesus on trial before Pontius the Pilot. Pilot didn't stick up for Jesus. He just washed his hands instead.

Anyways, Jesus died for our sins, then He came back to life again. He went up to Heaven but will be back at the end of the Aluminum. His return is foretold in the book of Revolution."

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